

in the light (hold me and don't you ever let it die) by ceruleanstorm

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Summary:

Mike and Eleven make their permanent mark on 1986

written for TWG fall-free-for-all.

in the light (hold me and don't you ever let it die)

Author's Note:

this was thrown together very haphazardly, but I hope you enjoy it nonetheless.

Mike was pretty sure he was lost.

He walked this road a hundred times before, the sound of leaves crunching under his sneakers comforting and familiar in the dark of the forest, so often he knew the beaten path like the back of his hand. So how could he have gotten lost? Coming in through Mirkwood where he had left his bike on the ground, wheels spinning, past the big oak tree, a left at the dead pine, over the dry creek bed, he'd followed carefully and counted every step. But now he was standing in open ground, a few trees here and there and a few boulders. He swallowed. *I'm nowhere near the cabin.*

He wasn't even supposed to be out when it was this dark, not after what happened to Will in 1983, but daylight savings had just ended and now the sun was setting around five, the effect jarring to Mike. He hated how his body and brain wanted to shut down once the light was gone, the way he struggled to keep his eyes open after eight o'clock. Eventually he would get used to it, but for now it was just another annoyance.

Mike kept treading through the dead leaves, figuring he could retrace his steps. He'd only walked a few strides when he saw a familiar light in the distance and a smile broke out on his face as he started to run towards. It always happened that way; he'd walk most of the way and then see the light before bolting, running because when it came to El, he could just never wait too see her. Panting as he jumped over the tripwire in a wild move that Steve would've been very proud of, he sprinted to the door and was about to knock when the door flew open, no one standing behind it.

"Hello?" her voice called out to him from somewhere inside the cabin.

“Hey!” he panted, hands on his knees. Then she appeared in front of him, dressed in the long shirt Benny gave her- one of her favorites- and plaid pyjama bottoms, her frizzy curls escaping the bun on her head. He loved when her hair did that, and it was so fun to play with. Her soft face lit up when they made eye contact, a spark of electricity passing between them in only a millisecond. “You called on the supercomm, is everything okay?”

El nodded, pulling him inside the warm little cabin and down beside her on the couch. “My dad-” she still broke out into a smile every time she could call Chief Hopper her dad all these years since he adopted her, “he’s staying at the station. He said I could have one of you guys over to keep me company.”

“Oh cool, cool.” Mike smiled back at her, keeping his hands to himself (he really wanted to play with the escaped curls). God, she was just so beautiful in the dim light of the cabin, he wondered if she knew. He wondered if he could tell her. They were dating after all, and he was still a little in shock, and boyfriends could say that to their girlfriends. He bit his lip, deciding instead to say “And he was okay with *me* coming over?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t he be?”

“I dunno,” Mike shrugged, “we’re dating,”- *keep it together, Wheeler, we get you’re dating*- “don’t fathers usually disapprove of their daughter’s boyfriends?”

Confusion washed over El’s face. She understood the stereotype, yes, and could see her dad not liking who she dated, but it was Mike. Who didn’t like Michael Wheeler? “He likes you. He says you’re trustworthy and smart.” she giggled when Mike’s eyes widened, “he just never tells you because he thinks you would get cocky.”

“Oh, consider my ego inflated.” laughed Mike, El laughing with him. It was a win to hear El say Hopper liked him, because he supposed that the man, as nice as he’d been to Mike since he found out that Hopper hid her from him, would never actually speak those very words.

“What did you want to do tonight?” Mike asked, poking her in the

stomach after they'd stopped laughing. This is what he loved, being with her in these quiet moments and small hours. They were fifteen now, and they'd become best friends as well as boyfriend and girlfriend. They just fit together, everything was easy between the two of them. The laughter, the teasing, the flirting. The comfort of knowing and understanding someone completely.

"Fireflies." she said the instant the last words left his mouth. Her face was excited and then she was jumping off the couch. Mike followed her into the tiny kitchen where jars were beginning to float out from cabinets to high for her to reach.

"Shorty." Mike laughed and she stuck her tongue out.

"Lanky." she fired back.

"Are there still fireflies around this time of year?" Fall had settled long ago in Hawkins and they were coming upon winter.

El responded with a shrug, handing him a jar. "Maybe not. I still want to look for them, is that okay?"

"Yeah, sure!" her smile had him grinning as well. He waited for her as she went to get her coat from her bedroom, and that's when his eyes landed on the small table beside him. Sprawled over newspapers were tiny wooden figures all kinds, little bears, a fish, a deer, a turtle, a couple of rabbits, all living peacefully in a pile of wood shavings. Next to them lay a carving knife with the initials "J.H" in red paint. Mike picked up the knife gingerly as not to cut himself on the edge, thinking how Lucas would probably geek out over this.

"Hey, El!" he called to her from the kitchen, "what's going on over here on the table?"

"Oh the table? Dad's taken up woodcarving again. He says his dad taught him." El said as she came out of her room bundled in one of Hopper's old fleeces.

"Is he teaching you?" Mike asked, setting the knife back in its place.

El shook her head and grabbed her jar. "Not yet. He wants too but he says he has to get good again."

“Oh.” Mike followed her out the door.

Together they sat on the only one step, El leaning her head down on Mike’s shoulder, their hands intertwined. The silence of the night filled the air between, the gentle lullaby of the woods of birds chirping and owls cooing and little creatures scurrying across the dead leaves to get back to their tiny little homes, the only sound for miles.

It was several minutes before either said anything. Another thing Mike loved. They didn’t always have to talk, like he knew other couples at school could barely stand the silence that could linger between two people, but not with Mike and El. Sometimes the quiet was just as comforting as the sound of their voices.

The setting sun did not linger for long as they waited. It’s orange and pink glow faded over the tops of the barren trees only to be replaced by a deep indigo that flooded the night sky with stars.

“Want to hear something funny?” El whispered after a minute, squeezing his hand.

“Sure.” Mike nodded. He pulled her closer as the cold air was starting to bite the skin of his fingers.

“I thought the sun was going to be around longer, you know, after daylight savings? Dad explained it to me, but I can never remember how it’s supposed to go.”

Mike let out a laugh. “Yeah, me neither. Mr. Clark used to say that a good way to remember it was that in the spring, we *spring* an hour forward and then in the fall, we *fall* backward.” he explained, El giggling at the way he stressed the specific words. “So the sun stays out longer in the spring, but it gets darker earlier in the fall.”

El nodded against his shoulder. He closed his eyes, and let the silence fall in again. In the back of his mind he wondered whether or not it was the perfect moment to tell her how pretty she had looked in the amber light of the cabin, in the dying light of the sun.

“I don’t think the fireflies are out tonight.” Mike shattered the quiet,

his girlfriend sighing as she admitted that she didn't think so either. "Anything else you want to do?"

"Not really, unless you have any ideas. We could just stay out here, it's nice."

It was, and so Mike nodded. In dark, it was hard to marvel her, but he was still determined. He wanted to stay this way forever, just her and him, just El and Mike. An idea settled in the forefront of his mind. *No*, he thought, *that's stupid and sappy. She'll think it's lame.*

El likes sappy, another part of him rationalized, *and she doesn't ever think you're lame.*

Part of Mike has to wonder if she's the one putting those thoughts in his head, as she sometimes can do in the Void, but her hazelnut irises are wide open, staring up at the expanse of stars. "Stay here." he said, squeezing her shoulder and smiling at her confused face. Through the open door and into the cabin, Mike ran and grabbed Hopper's carving knife. *This is your dumbest idea yet, Wheeler.* A smile, then he walked back out into the dark and cold.

"Come with me." he told her, taking one her freezing hands. "Yikes, you hands are like ice, El!"

Her laughter rang through the forest, and she squeezed his hand again, giving him goosebumps. But he didn't let go.

"Where are we going? You're not going to try anything with that knife are you, because I'll have you know I am a very powerful mage-" she wondered out loud as he wove them in and out of trees.

"It's a surprise! And why would I take on a mage like you with only a wood carving knife?" He turned back to give her a wild smile and she rolled her eyes.

They walked a little ways farther through the dead leaves until the came upon a huge tree that towered over its neighbors.

"I got lost on my way here tonight." Mike figured he should explain after looking back and seeing the lost look in her eyes. "I wanted to make another marker just incase I ever go this way again."

“Oh, okay. What kind of marker? Is that what the knife is for?” El asked.

Mike nodded. “Can you turn around, just for a second, I just need to do something.”

“Um, okay.” El turned on the heel of her boot, facing away from him.

With his girlfriend facing the other way, Mike took the knife to the bark of the tree. He began to edge away it carefully, biting his lip in concentration. *M...*

“Can I turn around now?” El pleaded and he could see her covering her eyes to keep herself from peeking.

“Just give me five more seconds!” *W...* “Okay, you can turn around.” Mike took a step back to look at his work, the carving knife cold in his shaking hand.

El stepped up to the roots of the tree, her fingers tracing the incisions he made in the wood. “*M W?* Is that for you? Mike Wheeler?”

“Yeah, and now you write your initials.” he pressed the wooden handle of the knife into her hand.

“My initials? What are we doing?”

Of course she doesn't know what you're talking about you clueless asshole! Mike's shoulders fell as he realized that El had no idea what was going on, and that his stupid sappy idea had failed. “Couples do it...” he started to say, rubbing the back of his neck. “They carve their initials into stuff, I dunno, as way to show their together.” He then reeled back, half expecting her to roll her eyes and walk away.

But she lit up, glowing even in the darkness. Her smile was sweet and the light in her eyes envied that of the stars. Eagerly she took the knife and began to carve an “E” into the tree. *Holy shit, she's beautiful.*

Mike coughed, again swallowing his desire to embarrass himself. “Why not J?”

“Well nobody calls me Jane, not really, expect for Becky and Kali,

and anyways it's the name you came up, so it's my favorite." she said, as if it was nothing. Mike was sure that even the dark his face was red, and he was rubbing his neck again.

"E. H." El ran her hand over her work before stepping back and taking Mike's hand. He wasn't looking at her, and El tried to ignore the hurt in her chest. She handed the knife back to him. "All done."

"One more thing!" Mike realized, back at the tree in an instant. Between their initials he added a small plus sign, then he dropped to his knees to carve an 86 under El's writing. "There we go. Now we'll be able to remember when we wrote it."

Taking him off guard, El came up behind Mike and kissed him on the cheek. "M.W. and E.H, 86. I love this Mike. I love you."

"I love you too." he turned around in her arms, and kissed her properly, fighting the smile on his face as their lips met. He pulled away and bravery struck him. "I've been meaning to tell you all night, you look so beautiful." The words just poured out of him and left him empty as he expected the worst. But instead of the worst, El kissed him again.

"You're a giant doofus, you know that! You can tell me you love me like it's nothing but you get all flustered when you try to tell me I'm beautiful." her laughter really was the sweetest sound.

Mike shook off his embarrassment. "Sorry, I know, I'm not very good at this boyfriend thing and-"

"It's okay Mike." she put her finger to his lips, glancing behind them at their carved initials. "You are pretty good at this boyfriend thing."

They departed from the oak tree, giggling and laughing as they teased and taunted each other, back into the light waiting for them.

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Hopper was lost.

He had taken a new way through the woods, even though Dr. Owens had given him the all clear back in '85, just to shake things up. The

paranoia never left him anyway. He was stumbling and cursing his way through the trees when he found it.

“M.W + E.H. ‘86”

The chief of police put his head in hands. Of course they would do this. He tried not to think about how he had written “J.H & J.B” back in his locker in high school. Oh well.

Kids these days.

Author's Note:

much love, and check out the other fall free for all stories on tumblr!!!